TRANSCRIPT—MARJORIE MCCLAIN DENDY

Speaker: Marjorie McClain Dendy

Date: before 1992

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side A, 00:31:22; side B, 00:16:27 (00:48:49 total)

Transcriber: Alice Helms

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Abstract: Marjorie "Marge" Gladys McClain Dendy, mother of Cissy Dendy, speaks about the McClain family which goes back to when her ancestors were slaves in Buncombe County. Marjorie McClain Dendy died in Asheville on May 26, 1992.

START OF AUDIO FILE 1.

Cissy, Grandma Carter is the mother of my mother. She was born Margaret Elizabeth Gudger, March 21, 1857 to Mandy and one of the Gudger sons. I do not know his name. Someday maybe I'll go to Azalea, which is in Buncombe County between Asheville and Swannanoa, and perhaps I can find the name of him there. Grandma Mandy had several children by Mr. Gudger but the only one do I know her name and that was Hattie. She had several black children by another slave husband, or as they did in those days, they just had children. The only one I know is Uncle Anthony, but I do know he had another brother and a sister who Grandma took with her to Newport when she was free. Grandma lived in Swannanoa with old man Gudger and was raised as his granddaughter by him and his wife until their deaths. At the age of sixteen she was raped

by her own father and gave birth to a daughter named Hannah. Later she had two children, Henrietta Suddie, who was my mother, Hattie, I don't know any middle name, and both of them were by Matthew Patton. They were born in Swannanoa, North Carolina. This is also located in Buncombe County.

The children of Aunt Hattie consist of one daughter and her name was Willie Mae Maxwell. Aunt Hattie was married to John Maxwell.

Aunt Kate was married. Grandma was also married to a Mr. Carson, and Aunt Katie was a Carson. Aunt Katie, as far as I know her only name was Katie, I don't think it was Katherine or anything of that nature. Aunt Katie had three children, one by her first husband, James Norman, and by her second husband, John Minch, there were two daughters Mamie Lee and May Alma. Both daughters are dead. Aunt Kate is dead. I don't know Aunt Kate's third husband's name. They were married in Columbus, Ohio.

My own mother married Orange McClain and she had fourteen children but only seven lived to adulthood. Their names, in order, are Theodore R. McClain, Eugene W. McClain, Willis K. McClain, Annie Matilda McClain, Lydie Mae McClain, Thomas J. McClain, and Gladys Marjorie McClain.

Those who were infants who lived to be named were Lilly Bell, lived to be eighteen months old, or approximately two years old. The others were tiny infants, Napoleon, Winthrop, Wallace, and Leon.

Uncle Anthony was able to read and write so he would write to the family and keep in touch throughout his lifetime. Uncle Anthony was one of the black children that

Mandy took with her when she left the farm in Azalea, North Carolina, County Buncombe, and walked from the Gudger farm to some place in Newport, Tennessee, where she and the family lived and she raised her other children.

Uncle Anthony had children and the only one I know, his name was William, and William used to come quite often and visit my mother. He played a guitar and he would always bring us some ice cream when he came.

But Grandma Mandy was supposed to have been a very strong-willed woman, who resented having the children by her master's son, and she resented being beaten by him because she corrected Grandma, who was the pet of the family. He was a drunkard and he resented the black children having food. And although they were not his property, they were his father's property. He came in drunk one night and filed the teeth of Grandma's half-brothers, and they were unable to eat for some time because their mouths became infected.

When Grandma Mandy left Swannanoa, Azalea—I always say Swannanoa because Azalea is so close to Swannanoa—she was carrying a child by the old Gudger drunkard, but evidently it was born prematurely, because she put it in a box and left it somewhere in the vicinity of what was called Valley Street and is now called Charlotte Street Extension. And she continued to walk until she arrived in Newport.

My mother Henrietta was married to Orange McClain from Gowensville, South Carolina. Pop left South Carolina when he was twenty-one, came to North Carolina for a short while, and went to Chattanooga, Tennessee where he went into business with a cousin whose last name was Angel, I do not know his first name. And for a while they

ran a restaurant and then he returned to Asheville, or maybe Asheville was the second place, I don't remember, I'll have to ask Tommy. He worked for a railroad, the Southern Railroad. And when he and mom married and they started having a family, he did not make enough money on the railroad so he left the railroad and went to Hans Rees Tannery and that's where he was working when he died in 1942.

Grandma also had a daughter named Lucy—I forgot about her—before she married Grandpa Carter. Grandpa Carter of course was mother's stepfather, but she took his name after Grandma married him. And to her union with McCoy she had a daughter named Lucy. Aunt Lucy when she was eighteen went off with the traveling show, I don't know if it was vaudeville or what they called it then, but at any rate, she was in a show, and she developed tuberculosis and had to return home. Prior to her going though, she was a student at the old Catholic Hill School, which later became Stephens-Lee School, but at that time it was high school and elementary school combined. And in order to establish a library in the school, which was Asheville's first public high school with elementary combined, the students raised money to buy the books and place a library and references into the school system. There was a choice for the one who raised the highest amount of money, there was a choice of either a piano as a prize or an organ. Aunt Lucy McCoy raised the most money, and she chose the piano. And of course later is when she left home, went into show business and died at a very early age, I'm not sure, she was in her twenties, but she died of tuberculosis.

Grandma Carter's husband, Henry Carter, fought in the Civil War, the Spanish-American War. I still have the kerchief he wore around his neck during the Spanish-American War. Grandpa was a born soldier and he loved to go to war. But by the time

World War II came he was too old to go, and besides he was drawing a pension for injuries he had received in the Spanish-American War. Grandpa didn't receive any compensation for his wounds in the Civil War, but he was wounded in the Civil War. And naturally he fought on the side of the Confederacy because he was in the South. His home was out in Sylva or Dillsboro, in that area of North Carolina. I know that some of his folks were called Dills and Dillingham, but he and Grandma lived in Sylva for quite a while. That's where Uncle Theodore and Uncle Gene were born.

Grandmother used to tell stories about her life as a little girl, and as I said she was the pet of the family. And although her father was a drunk, he did not want her mother to do any correcting of her, she was to have her way. So Grandma grew up a spoiled woman as well as a spoiled little girl, as she told it. She would do things, and then when she got spanked or whipped, her mother heard the old guy who was her father, would come in and beat her mother for whipping her. And of course the old man who owned them, his wife did not like Grandma, so she decided to sell her. So, one day when the old man was out of town for several days, Grandma knew that she had someone coming to make the purchase, so she hid in the corn stack. I'm sure you've seen the corn stacked up, it looks in the shape of a teepee. And they have them stacked about farms in the south. And Grandma said that she hid in that all night and all day until Grandpa, as she always called Mr. Gudger, returned home and she told him what had happened. This did not stop Grandma from being the pet of the family. She still stayed in the house with the old man and of course she grew up there. When he died, after the war, why his family left him, he was broke, he had no money. Grandma was the only one really with him. She was just six years old at the time of freedom. But she stayed with him, and of course children at that

age were helpful in the house and around the house anyway. But when he died Grandma received their family Bible, and he gave her before he died, certain records and things that would have been valuable had she been able to keep her hands on them later in life.

Grandma was very, very fond of white people. And the woman she worked for, Mrs. Alexander, who ran a boarding house, or inn, Alexander Inn in Swannanoa, was given the books for safe keeping, because Grandma kept my Aunt Kate's children and she didn't want anything to happen to them. When Grandma left Swannanoa she asked for them, and old lady Alexander said she didn't have them. Later, in the thirties, when I was in my preteen years, the Gudger descendants—I know one was a young woman and one was a young man—wanted to write a family history and not having any written records, they came to Grandma, and once again they tried to get the Bible and family records and from Mrs. Alexander, who said, no, she didn't have them.

About once every two weeks or a month or something—I don't remember because I was so very, very angry and hated anyone connected with the family, and so I would not stay around when Grandma related the family history to them as she knew it.

I do know that Mr. Gudger's original name was not Gudger, it was some Irish name that was difficult to pronounce and spell so they anglicized it and he changed his name to Gudger after he came to the United States. When the book was published, The Gudgers of the Mountain, that is when I learned that the original name was not Gudger.

Grandma died on V-E Day. She had died of kidney failure and I was on my way to the hospital for surgery when the message came. I do not know the date, but it was in May of forty-five. All these dates can be filled in later.

One more detail about Grandma Mandy, her job as a slave was to do the weaving, she was the weaver for the family, and Grandma said as a little kid she used to sit beside her and card the wool. A spinner rather. During the time of slavery, different slaves had different jobs, and so Grandma Mandy's job was an indoor job which set her apart during slave times, set her apart from the field hands.

Grandma Carter was a beautiful woman, I am told, and when she was very young, quite popular. Women hated her, men loved her. Her marriage to Mr. Carson was short-lived. As I understand, he was ebony. And the children, evidently they lived out where they went out in the woods rather than having outdoor toilet facilities, naturally nobody then had indoor plumbing. And the children, Mom and Aunt Hattie and Aunt Hannah saw him sitting on this sapling and they were laughing and said, 'Oh, look at that black snake.' And that was his penis that they saw hanging down. And he resented it, so he hung them. And Grandma came home from work and found the girls hanging and she cut them down. Mom—of course naturally, you know Mom—and Aunt Hattie left and Aunt Hannah died. Later Grandma beat—I understand she was strong as an ox, too—and she beat him up and put him out. So when Aunt Kate was born she and Mr. Carson were separated. But he was dead by the time she married Grandpa Carter. We found that out when Grandma went to get her pension from Grandpa, widow's pension, and of course he was dead.

And as I've said, Grandma was spoiled, she had her way. I understand Mr. McCoy—who was my dad's cousin also—was affluent, I would say. Later we'll find out how he happened to be affluent. But Grandma had—which was something that most people didn't have then—a carriage and a nursemaid for Aunt Lucy and someone to help

her with the house. And Mom said whenever she wanted special attention from Mr. McCoy, she'd just pull a faint and pass out, or pretend she was anyway. She could get whatever she wanted. But that union was to be short-lived also, because we found that cousin McCoy was a counterfeiter, and that was why he had so much money. And of course later, she married Grandpa Carter. And that was his pension that she lived on after coming to Asheville, when she left Swannanoa. Willis was able to get that for her so she had an income every month.

Ah, there's more to tell about that but I won't go into that, it isn't really relevant to our family. But I guess I should too, because later on you might get that story from somebody. Dr. White was Grandma's doctor and she would pitch tantrums and have all kinds of fits with Mom, who was a very mild mannered person. But Dr. White could get anything out of her. He wanted to borrow some money, he told her he was in trouble with the law for having narcotics, carrying it on him in his medical bag. And she would lend him, or give him rather, I don't remember if it was twenty-five hundred or twelve hundred but at any rate, it was over a thousand dollars. He would treat her and all of the family that is Pop and Mom's family, without charge for the rest of our lives. Yes, Dr. White lived down the street from me in Asheville. So Grandma let him have the money. Now Dr. White told me and my sister another lie, he told her that he was about to lose his house, the mortgage had gotten behind and he was about to lose his house and Grandma let him have the money. He told me that he was about to lose his furniture. But of course now he already had the money, when he got the money from Grandma—this is told to us later by him. He told me he was about to lose his furniture that he bought from Pearlman's and of course I saw his furniture and you've seen it, too. And I do know that

was furniture that was sold by Railroad Salvage at the time—Mr. and Mrs. Pearlman's furniture company was called Railroad Salvage. So I don't know what the story is, but if ever you hear that Dr. White treated our family for nothing, or that we were a charity patients, it's a lie. Mrs. White may not even know that Grandma let her husband have that money. But that is one story about Grandma. Grandma was quite a knitter, she could knit beautifully. And she also quilted, and you've seen some of the quilts that she made. She used to make the stars and she would cut them out meticulously and put them together in little bitty pieces, making one large star.

And she also wanted to send me to college but there again, Dr. White wanted the money so he told her that not everyone was college material. Therefore I got no money from Grandma to go to college. Grandma was color struck, as I told you she loved white people or light complected people and she wasn't too fond of my dad because he was not light, he was the color of your dad, he was the color of my husband John Dendy. And she didn't like the idea of Mom having those little pickaninnies in tow. But she did love me, and I was her favorite child. And I'll never forget when I was small she gave me a pair of shoes that were button shoes—you've probably seen them in some of the Our Gang shows—that buttoned on the side. And I loved them so, that I have a corn to this day, that although I've had it removed surgically, it still comes back. And I didn't want to give up my shoes, because Grandma gave them to me. And I never got a spanking when Grandma came to visit, because Mom spanked me once when she was there, and she left Asheville and went back to Swannanoa and never came back for quite a long time.

She remained strong until the last year of her life, except for a urinary problem. And she used to run errands for Mom and go to the store, and she talked like a

mountaineer. She said she could go anywhere and she could kick her heels up over our heads at seventy-some years old. And she dipped snuff, and she was a very untidy person. She didn't like to take a bath in her old age. If she took a bath on Friday, she didn't want to take another one on Saturday or Sunday. But I did love Grandma, she was a character. And when she passed, I missed her terribly.

And Grandma was also a great markswoman. She could shoot anything anywhere within distance of a firearm, side arm, six shooter, like a Smith & Weston Thirty-eight. And of course she always said she could hit him dead in the eye. If it was a snake, she could shoot his tail off, or his head off. And if it was a rat, she'd shoot him dead in the eyes. So, Manuel and Sonny were witnesses to her firearm capabilities. She was very partial to Sonny because she spoiled him rotten. When he was six years old, she'd still put his clothes on unless she didn't feel like it, and he wouldn't and then of course I'd have to do it. But still I loved Grandma, she was a character.

Mom on the other hand, was mild tempered, quiet and hard working. She stood at the washing board and at the ironing board all day or all night, depending on what time of the week it was. And she always tried to be home with the children. She was always there when we came home from school. That was why she took in laundry, so she could be home with the children. And I'll never forget those big pans of baked sweet potatoes, and sweet potatoes were sweet then. Oh boy, you'd come home from school and she'd have some baked sweet potatoes for you and there would be some sassafras tea, well mostly it was in the winter time when it was cold when we had hot chocolate, but sometimes there would be some cocoa there. And whenever there was a big snow and we went out to play with the sleds, and Tommy of course, when I say "we." Or build snowmen, why there

would be a big pan of homemade gingerbread—of course there wasn't no mixes then—and she'd have a big pot of hot chocolate and that would be delicious coming in out of the cold and snow.

She didn't do a lot of fussing like a lot of moms. Mom usually talked to you quietly, and all of the brothers and sisters that I've ever talked with said they'd rather Mom give them a real hard whipping than for her to talk to us, because she could really make you feel bad. And of course the older brothers and sisters used to be corrected about something they had done. But people would tell Dad that Mom didn't do anything to the kids. If they'd gotten into a fight or gotten into a dispute with the other kids, and Etta didn't do a thing about it. Pop come home fussing, like John used to do me, when he'd heard something from somebody, usually his sister. But what Mom did, she would give you a whipping with a little keen switch and then she'd sit down quietly and tell you what it was that you did or didn't do, that was wrong. And she always said 'It hurt her worse.' I never knew what she meant by that till I got children of my own, that she had to whip us. But a lot of the other mothers in the neighborhood, you could hear them all over the neighborhood, yelling and screaming and cussing and fussing, and beating the kids over the head with sticks. But Mom never was abusive, when she whipped us, she'd paddle us with a butcher knife, paddle us with a spatula, or a keen switch.

Pop could not read and write, but Mom did. Mom loved to read and although she did not have much education, she educated herself by reading. And she was a beautiful storyteller. A young man who was a friend of my brother Willis's, used to buy novels and bring them to mom to read so that she could tell the story because she told the story so beautifully.

And all of us are book worms, I guess for that reason. Because Mom used to tell us, when you feel like getting into mischief, get a good book and stay home and that will keep you out of trouble. And, of course, she was referring then to our biological urges that we get when after we reach puberty. And if we had a good book and was at home reading, there wasn't any chance of our getting into those biological urges.

Pop, not reading, he spent his evenings after he'd done his chores around the house, yard work or when we did have chickens or a garden, then he would go to the store and visit, or up to a good neighbor of ours named Clark, and visit with the men in the evening.

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( ) on her father's side, Matthew Patton also of Swannanoa, and her half-brother was Sam Patton, who was married to Maggie Patton, and their children were Oma, Guy, John who we called Jack, and—. Oma, Annie, Jack and Guy. Uncle Sam's children.

And then there was Aunt Tilly who was married to John Smith, and Mother lived with them for a time, as a matter of fact from her early years—she was in school—till his death. Uncle John was a fireman. A lot of work was done by steam then rather than by electricity or gas powered engines, they were steam engines. And there was supposed to have been some sabotage on the ( ).

As you know, Mitchell was—Grandmother was married to Jack (or John) Patton, Mom's nephew. And of course Jack had no children to my knowledge. Oma had a daughter but

her daughter is dead. Annie had a daughter and her daughter's dead. Oma's granddaughters, one lives down by Aunt Ruby and she's married to a Walker. I don't know those children's names but she has two daughters, two granddaughters. One lives by Ruby, she's married to a Walker and the other one I don't know. The people that you met once when we went down to Glen Alpine are Guy, Mother's nephew, Guy's children, grandchildren. He has one living daughter, Vera, who is now a Rice. She was originally married to Garrison and of course both of her husbands are dead. Vera has three living children I believe. Some of hers are dead. There is Juanita Lydle, you met her. And Perona Evans whom you met. Perona lives in Morganton and so does Juanita. Alan Garrison who is a retired Major now living in Greensboro, married to Fanny, his wife is named Fanny. His job is teaching in Winston-Salem and so he commutes daily. Fanny works in the Textile Department, whether she's a teacher or what I don't know, at A & T College and they have two daughters and one son. One daughter should be finished out at A & T now but I don't know the what the other two children's grades are, I've forgotten. Those are the great-nieces and -nephews of Mom on her half-brother's side. All of the children of her sisters are dead, unless, I don't know about James. James Harmon may still be living but I do know that Mamie and all the rest of them. I don't know about Willa May either because I never heard from her. That concludes most that I can think of of Mom's side of the family. Next I will start talking about Pop's as far as I know about his.

Joseph McClain. Date of birth, place of birth unknown. Brothers and sisters to my knowledge are John, Melissa, Matilda, but there were others that I do not know. One sister whose name I do not know, but his cousins and relatives, their names are Camp,

Mooney, O'Hannon, Angel, and I can't think of any others right now. Grandpa had one sister, Aunt Melissa, who had no children. Another sister, Matilda, I don't know about her children but I understand she had some and later she settled in Philadelphia. One sister, I don't know her name, was rather ambitious and one time worked and lived in Atlanta and how I know that there were other brothers beside his brother John, when the sister that had lived in Atlanta had acquired quite a bit of property and money and when she died, the brothers wasted the money and that's all I know, they ran through it, they didn't have anything. That's all I know about her. One sister had several children, I don't know how many, by a white landowner as I understand it. One son was named Sherman, one was named Ernest. The others I don't know but they were educated in Pennsylvania. As a matter of fact they were the first McClains to my knowledge, or as I was told, to have had any formal education of trades because their father sent them north to be educated. Marriage between blacks and whites was prohibited at that time. So she lived on the place as his housekeeper and they had a family and raised the family together.

Joseph McClain, my grandfather, married Jane Walker. The only person in her family I know is her brother, John. She had other brothers because she was born in Laurens, South Carolina, and also her brothers, and the brothers being older went back to steal them away from the plantation because they were not freed as slaves, they went back and got them one by one or two. There was one child, the youngest child in the family was left because their lives were threatened if they returned. I don't know whether it was the patterollers, or the owners, or who that were going to kill them if they caught them, so one child, one daughter, what her name was I do not know, was left in Laurens, South Carolina. And that's all I know of the Walker family.

To Joseph and Jane Walker McClain were born Orange, my father, Sloan, Nancy and Melissa. Jane was a very small woman and Dad said she never weighed a hundred pounds except when she was pregnant and Grandpa believed good things came in little packages because his second wife was small too and black as well as our grandmother Jane. When I say black, I mean ebon in color. Grandpa was a half-breed Indian and of course Indians and Negros mixed quite a bit in the south, especially around South Carolina and Georgia during that period of time. I recall meeting Walterine's aunt and she asked me who were my people, where were they from, and immediately when I said McClains and O'Hannons she stopped me and said, 'Oh they're Indians,' and I said, 'Oh no they're not, they're not Indians, they're black, considered black.' So we are originally, that is our family on Pop's side, came from the South Carolina area as far as I know. I know nothing about their owners as slaves or anything of that nature. Grandpa was never a slave and knew nothing about it. After Grandma Jane's death, Grandpa married again and I cannot remember his wife's name. I used to know it. She was either a McMillan or a McDaniel but anyway, they had a family too and their children were Elizabeth, Edna, Horace, Floyd, and Rob. Of that family, only the descendants of Floyd are living. Rob's family, so far as I know it, his children are dead. He's dead. His son and daughter were Maggie and Joseph McClain. Maggie died in Chicago, Joseph in South Carolina. Horace married Sally Miller, they had no children. Elizabeth died unmarried. She died when she was quite young, I think she was in her twenties or teens. I barely remember her but I do recall her visiting us. Edna was the youngest child, she was the same age as my oldest brother. She married George McGriff of Brooklyn, New York and they had no children. Floyd married Hattie—I don't know if it was Booker or what. I'll have to ask their

children that live in Tryon. They had Floyd Jr., Ezelle, Harold and James and the daughters were Virginia, Cleo—her name was really Theophus but Cleo was what she's called—and Nursy May. May is married to Arthur White of Tryon, North Carolina. Cleo lives in Tryon, North Carolina. Cleo has never married; she's still a McClain. Harold is in a Veteran's Hospital, I don't remember where now. He used to be in Statesville but he's closer to Tryon now where his sisters can visit him and he can come out on furlough. He's in a military hospital. And the rest of them are dead. James died in Chicago. Ezelle in Greenville, South Carolina and Floyd in New York. Of the first marriage, my father's children have already been listed. Sloan married Laura Brown. To that marriage I think there was about ten children. I may not list all of them but there was Ella, Hattie, Ernest, Alonzo, Bertha, Nancy, Elizabeth, Annabelle, LeRoy, and Joseph Henry. Alonzo was married to Evelyn, and I don't remember Evelyn's last name. They had Gladys Jean, Ella Louise, Alonzo Jr., Rock Bobby, James Edward, Callie, and Elizabeth. I can not think of any of the others right now. I do not know the children of Alonzo's brothers, except I met Ernest's daughter and her name is Carmella. Ernest McClain. She lives in Raleigh. Her mother, I can't think of her name, you'll have that later. That's about all I can tell you right now, Cissy.

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